

BWW Review: MARY POPPINS Soars at Syracuse Stage

by Natasha Ashley Dec. 4, 2016



Jonathan Burke and Emily Brockway. Photo by Michael Davis.

The very adored and "practically perfect" nanny has landed at Syracuse Stage for the "jolly holiday" season. *Mary Poppins*, directed by Peter Amster, is a unique and wonderful opportunity for the musical theatre students in Syracuse University's Department of Drama to perform alongside professional actors as they do every holiday season.

Mary Poppins is a musical based on the stories of P.L. Travers and the familiar Walt Disney film that starred the amazing Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke. The show, of course, features much of the original music and lyrics by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman, along with new songs and additional music and lyrics by George Stiles and Anthony Drewe. The music is wonderfully directed by Brian Cimmet and brought beautifully to life by the talented orchestra.

Most know the classic story of the magical nanny that lands at 17 Cherry Tree Lane in London to care for the two mischievous Banks children. Mary Poppins (Emily Brockway) takes Jane (Sofia Benderski) and Michael (Rueby Holsopple) on magical adventures while still providing lessons that will help the children grow and care for others. Mary Poppins not only saves the children from themselves with her teaching, but she also reveals to Mr. Banks (Benjamin Howes) and Mrs. Banks (Kelly McCormick) that the main thing missing in Jane and Michael's lives is their parents.

Those that are only familiar with Disney film plot will be surprised to see that there is a lot more detail about who the Banks parents are in the stage musical adaptation. Julian

Fellowes brilliant book is also much darker in tone. Mr. Banks is not just the workaholic banker, but a man who is very deeply troubled by his childhood. Mrs. Winifred Banks is not the air-headed suffragette, but a woman looking to feel like she has a place in life. She longs to be the actual caregiver for her children. Jane and Michael aren't just their ignored children. They are children that have sassy attitudes and are, at times, disrespectful of things and to people. Mary Poppins is the practically perfect nanny who is very much needed in their live. She and some familiar and unfamiliar friends help the Banks family until the wind changes.



Jonathan Davis at center with the company of Marry Poppins. Photo by Michael Davis.

The entire cast performs the tunes passionately. There is attention to detail for every note, dance move, and facial expression. The audience falls in love again with classic tunes such as "Spoonful of Sugar" and "Feed the Birds." The high-energy and toe-tapping numbers such as "Step in Time" and "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" come to life in a very entertaining way thanks in part to the intricate choreography by Anthony Salatino. The new numbers that were written for the original stage adaptation that premiered in London's West End are a highlight, including "Brimstone and Treacle," "Practically Perfect," and "Anything Can Happen." The musical performances are what make the show so magical.

The choice to dress some of the ensemble cast as chimney sweeps to assist with manipulating Linda Buchanan's set for scene changes was clever. However, having some of the chimney sweeps position themselves behind pieces of furniture and peak around to react to the scene taking place was a bit of a distraction at times. The stage also seemed crowded at times, which caused some items to fall or get knocked over because they were in the way. However, the professional actors covered it up well.

Speaking of the wonderful actors, as Mary Poppins, Emily Brockway is everything one would expect to see in the role. This confident and poised actress is definitely 'practically perfect in every way.' Her voice soars with such power and passion and she lights up the stage particularly well with her renditions of "A Spoonful of Sugar" and "Anything Can Happen." Her facial expressions and comedic charm are spit-spot on.

Jonathan Burke as Bert showcases some wonderful dance moves in "Step in Time," especially as he taps upside down while hanging from a platform hooked above the stage. Benjamin Howes portrays George Banks with such 'precision and order' and is highly memorable in "A Man Has Dreams." Kelly McCormick plays Winifred Banks with such poise. Her solo moment "Being Mrs. Banks" is a highlight.

Sofia Benderski captures Jane's spunky attitude perfectly and her strong voice shines in all of her numbers. Rueby Holsopple steals each scene with every line and facial expression as he portrays the young and curious Michael Banks. Marie Kemp doubles as Mrs. Brill and the Bird Woman and she portrays both roles memorably. She sings the familiar favorite "Feed the Birds" brilliantly.

Cheech Manohar's impeccable comedic timing ensures a highly entertaining performance as Robertson Ay. Richard Westfahl contribution to "Jolly Holiday" makes him a memorable Neleus. Joilet F. Harris is most wonderful as Mrs. Corey. Celia Madeoy brings down the house in "Brimstone and Treacle" as the 'holy terror' Miss Andrew.

Devon Painter's detailed and elaborate costumes add to each character perfectly. **Thomas C. Hase's lighting captures every feeling and emotion in every song and scene.** Of course, how would it be Mary Poppins if that magical nanny didn't fly? With the help of the flying director Shad Ramsey of ZFX, Inc. a number of the characters soared up into the stage rafters quite smoothly.

Syracuse Stage's production of *Mary Poppins* is a high-flying adventure that will surely delight everyone. It is full of big dance numbers, colorful costumes, and a flying nanny we all know and love. It is the perfect holiday family outing.

Running Time: Approximately two hours and fifty minutes with one twenty-minute intermission.

Mary Poppins runs through January 8, 2016 at the Archbold Theatre in the Syracuse Stage/SU Drama Complex at 820 E. Genesee St. in Syracuse, New York. For tickets and information, click [here](#). For information on the Syracuse University Department of Drama, click [here](#).